

# Power Game Experienced by Christine Collins In *Changeling* Film

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## ABSTRACT

In *Changeling* film, Collins as the female character experiences injustice. In this study, I want to reveal how the authorities abuse their power to Collins and the strategies that used by Collins to defeat the authorities' power. I will use the concept of abuse by the powerful to the powerless by Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci and power relations by Michel Foucault. I find out that power is easily abused and not stable because one time, it is the authorities that have the power, but at the other time, it is individual who has more power. The police and the doctors abuse their power to Collins. I find out that Collins uses some strategy to defeat the authorities' power. She is complying, gathering evidence, and getting allies. At first, she is powerless, but in the end, Collins can defeat the authorities' power and become powerful.

**Keywords:** Injustice, Authorities, Power, Abuse, Powerless, Powerful.

Mystery film is special compared to other genres because the production of a mystery film needs special elements such as perfect camera angles, scary soundtrack, and surprising plot. All those elements are very difficult to make. Mystery film is a film that focuses on the efforts of the investigator to solve the mysterious circumstances of a crime. The mystery film usually revolves around a murder, kidnapping, and rape that must be solved by a police officer or a detective. One mystery film that recently won an award is *Changeling*. The writer of this film, J. Michael Straczynski is an American writer and television producer. He works in films, television series, novels, short stories, comic books, and radio dramas. *Changeling* also directed by well-known director, Clint Eastwood. He is an American film actor, director, producer, composer, and politician.

*Changeling* is a good movie. It was written and directed by well-known people and won awards. First, *Changeling* is adapted from a true story that happened in Los Angeles. According to *Wikipedia.com*, "This film is adapted from the Wineville Chicken Coop Murders also known as the Wineville Chicken Murders in 1926." Second reason why I analyze this film because the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures named *Changeling* one of the 10 best films of 2008, as did the International Press Academy, which presents the annual Satellite Awards. It makes *Changeling* one of the best films and makes *Changeling* popular.

The major issue in this film is about injustice that happens to Collins as the main character in this film. Collins rebels against the power of the police and the doctor. They use their power repressively to Collins. At first, Collins cannot fight the power of the police and the doctor, but in the end, Collins can fight their power. In this study, I want to analyze how the state authorities abuse their power to Collins, and how Collins fights that kind of injustice. In this film, the state authorities abuse Collins when they force her to accept the boy. Collins here is considered powerless, she can fight injustice by pretending to accept the state authorities' power and using other's powers to support her. I am going to show that in life, someone that has power can become powerful and become powerless because power is not stable and can change in each person. Through this study, the reader can know how the power works in everyday life. The readers also will be given a mind if the one who is powerful can become powerless and vice versa.

To analyze this film, I will use the concept of abuse by the powerful to the powerless by Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci and power relations by Michel Foucault. To the issue of power in *Changeling*, I need to combine the two concepts, abuse by the powerful and power relations since in the film I discover that there are issues of abuse by the powerful and the fightback by the powerless in the film. There is power game between the government officials, represented by a policeman and two doctors, and common people, represented by Collins. The government officials as people with

power abuse Collins, but there is also resistance and even fight from Collins as a person with no power.

In daily interaction between people, they usually use power. Sometime inside of the power, there is oppression, but sometime people use power without oppression. Oppression in the power usually comes from the one who is powerful to the one who is powerless. The higher positions people in life tend to have more power and sometime use power with oppression. People who are powerful tend to force people who are powerless with their own ways.

According to Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci, there are two kinds of abuse by the powerful: emotional abuse and verbal abuse. "Emotional abuse is characterized by a climate or pattern of behavior(s) occurring over time [...] Thus, 'sustained' and 'repetitive' are the crucial components of any definition of emotional abuse" (Tomison, Adam M and Joe Tucci, 1997). Tomison and Tucci further says that emotional abuse includes ejecting, degrading, terrorizing, isolating, and corrupting or exploiting. On the other hand, to Tomison and Tucci verbal abuse is a negative defining statement told to the person, about the person, or by withholding any response thus defining the target as non-existent. Verbal abuse is also known as reviling. Therefore, it uses a word to attack, hurt, and injure someone. Verbal abuse includes accusing, blaming, judging, criticizing, threatening.

Usually power is imposed over the powerless. It is an ability to force someone to do things that they do not want to do. Therefore, if someone has power in their life, they can force someone with their power (Bálan, 1999). The one who is powerful one can do what they want and usually they attack the one who is powerless. To do that thing someone must have power. "Power is everywhere" (Foucault 1998, p. 93), however, "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1998, p. 93). Power can be found in everywhere. We can find it and we can gain it from everywhere. "Power is something which is performed, something which is more like a strategy than a possession." Power, according to Foucault, is maneuvers, tactics, and techniques that encourage the oppression of one group (Mills, 35). Power can be owned by using some strategy. Power operates in a social system and works in everyday life.

Foucault believed that knowledge is always a form of power. Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth', but has the power to make itself true (Foucault 1977, p. 27). According to him, power exists everywhere and comes from everywhere; it was a key concept because it acts as a type of relation between people, a complex form of strategy, with the ability to secretly shape another's behaviour. Foucault says that "by being combined and generalized, they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase in power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process" (Foucault 1977).

In the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*, Foucault says that "where there is power there is resistance" (Foucault, 142). It means that if someone uses his/her power over the powerless, the powerless will always resist against that powerful. This power game is common in life. The powerless always feels that s/he is being oppressed by the powerful and s/he wants to fight back.

The two concepts, therefore, are very useful to discuss the power game between the government officials and the main character, Collins, in *Changeling*. The concept of abuse by the powerful to the powerless by Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci is used to answer how the authorities abuse their power to Collins and power relations by Michel Foucault is used to answer the strategies used by Collins.

## **POWER GAME BETWEEN THE AUTHORITIES AND COLLINS**

This paper is the analysis of the abuse by the authorities to Collins as the main character. I divide the discussion into two parts. The first part will mainly discuss the abuse by the authorities to Collins and the other part will discuss the strategies used by Collins to fight back.

### **The Authorities' Abuse to Collins**

In this subchapter, I will show how the authorities abuse Collins. Collins as the main character in this film must fight the authorities' power in order to prove that she is right about the boy that actually is not her son. LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) and doctor from LACH (Los Angeles County Hospital) are the persons who abuse Collins. The authorities' power is so strong but Collins's power is not. The authorities use everything to show that they are more powerful than

Collins. They push, manipulate, and gain benefits from Collins. To explain the abuse by the authorities, I will divide it into two parts: the police's abuse and the doctors' abuse to Collins.

### ***The Abuse by the Police.***

The encounter between Collins and Jones, the police officer, happened when Collins reported her missing son to the police and Jones as the police officer agreed to help Collins to find her son. After a few days, Jones is successful in finding Collins' son. He gives the boy to Collins and he believes that the boy is discovered. However, Jones feels challenged when Collins says that the boy is not her son. As a police officer, he feels that Collins has underestimated him and therefore he uses his power to oppress Collins. Jones wants this case finish quickly therefore, he starts to abuse Collins verbally to determine the identity of her son and emotionally when he determines her mental condition.

Using only the boy's statements as proofs, Jones uses verbal abuse to Collins in order that Collins obeys him to accept the boy.

Collins: I don't know who he is, or why he's saying he's Walter, but there's clearly been some kind of mistake.

Jones: We agreed you would give him time to adjust --

Collins: He's four inches shorter than Walter. Boys his age don't shrink. If anything, he should be taller.

Jones: Maybe your measurements are off. Look, I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for --

From the conversation above, Jones blames Collins that her measurements are off. Blaming is one of the examples of verbal abuse according to Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci. He uses verbal abuse because Collins does not recognize her son. Jones pushes Collins to accept the boy although Collins says that the boy is not her son. As an expert, Jones should check again about that fact. Jones does not check the boy again. He makes an expert judgment and says that the boy is Collins's son. Stating that the measurements are off can also be classified as emotional abuse. Jones feels that he is more powerful than Collins, so he can say like that to Collins and blaming to Collins that she is wrong about the boy.

When Collins still believes that the boy is not her son and comes to Jones' office to talk about it, Jones blames her that she is a liar. Jones starts to abuse Collins again verbally.

Collins: I don't know! All I know is that he's lying!

Jones: Maybe so. Maybe he is a liar. But that's how he's been trained, isn't it? Lying was born in both of you. You're a liar and a troublemaker and if you ask me you've got no business walking the streets of Los Angeles.

Collins: Just a minute --

Jones: Because either you know you're lying, or you're not capable of knowing if you're lying or telling the truth. So which is it, Mrs. Collins? Are you a derelict mother? Or just nuts? Because from where I sit, those are the only options. (p. 49)

Jones blames Collins and judges that she cannot recognize her son. Blaming and judging are the example of the verbal abuse according to Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci. Jones even considers that Collins is a liar when she says that cannot remember her own son. He is judging Collins without any proof. He only thinks that Collins cannot recognize her son and wants Collins to accept the reality that the boy is her son. Jones also says that Collins is not a good mother. Jones always pushes and blames because he thinks that he is more powerful than Collins. He always threatens Collins to show that he is more powerful than Collins.

Even further, Jones uses verbal and emotional abuse by sending Collins to LA county general hospital.

Jones: She suffers from paranoia, delusions of persecution, and dislocation from reality. She may be a threat to herself or others. We recommend that she be conveyed to the psychopathic ward for treatment and observation until her senses can be restored. (p. 51)

Another verbal abuse that can be seen from the conversation above is judging. Jones judges that Collins suffers from paranoia, delusions of persecution, and dislocation from reality. Saying that Collins suffers from the illness is categorized as degrading. Actually, Collins is healthy, but Jones

degrades her and says that she is sick. Jones says that illness make Collins unable recognize her son. Therefore, he sends Collins to the LACH because she must get a special treatment for her illness. Knowing that Jones says like that, Collins is confused and cannot imagine that Jones will say like that to her. She cannot fight back because Jones already said to the nurse. He wants Collins to confess that the boy is her son by sending her to LACH.

### ***The Abuse by the Doctors.***

Two doctors get involved in using their powers over Collins. The first doctor is the one who is sent by Jones to identify the boy because Collins feels that the boy is not her son. The second doctor is the doctor in the county hospital.

Dr. Tarr's emotional and verbal abuse can be seen when he determines that there is something wrong with Collin's mental condition.

Dr. Tarr: As you can see, there's a perfectly sound medical explanation for all of this. But it's good for you to raise these questions. You should be apprised of all changes the lad went through during his absence.

Collins: Wouldn't I know whether or not he was my son? I'm his mother.

Dr. Tarr: Which means you're in no position to be objective. You are looking through the prism of extreme emotion at a boy who has changed from what you remember. He isn't the same boy that left here, just as a boy who goes off to war and returns isn't the same anymore. A mother's heart, driven by intuition and emotion rather than logic, sees these changes and rebels, insists that this cannot be your son. But that doesn't change the facts. (Beat) I'm willing to put my theory to the test of objectivity, Mrs. Collins... are you? (p.31)

From the conversation, Dr. Tarr says the same statement with the police that all things can be explained. He also uses verbal abuse in that conversation. He judges Collins that there is something wrong with her mother's instinct. He also degrades Collins mother's instinct. According to Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci judging is verbal abuse and degrading is emotional abuse. When she hears that statement, she is angry to Dr. Tarr, but she cannot do anything. She is shocked because of Dr. Tarr's words. He actually should help Collins to identify the boy not to check her. However, he checks Collins' condition and tells that Collins is mentally ill. He agrees with Jones's reports that Collins is mentally ill. Collins still defends herself that she is not ill. She does not believe that Dr. Tarr determines her only by looking Jones' report.

The second doctor, Dr. Steele, the doctor in the county hospital, also determines that Collins is mentally ill. Dr. Steele's verbal abuse can be seen when he determines Collins' illness.

Dr. Steele: So at first he was your son, but now he's not your son.(beat) Has this been going on for a long time? People...changing, becoming something other than what they are?

Collins: People don't change, doctor.

Dr. Steele: You don't think people change?

Collins: That's not what I --

Dr. Steele: And the police...they're not out to persecute you?

Collins: No. Of course not.

Dr. Steele: The police are here to protect us. (p. 65-66)

According to Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci, blaming is one of the examples of verbal abuse. Dr. Steele blames Collins he uses his knowledge and shows to Collins that he is right. Collins cannot explain that people change, but Dr. Steele can explain it. The power of the doctor's knowledge is something that undisputable. As a good doctor, he should be neutral between the police and Collins. However, the doctor here assists to the police. Actually, the police have relationship with the doctor. They have a conspiracy to push Collins to accept the boy.

### **Collins' Strategy to Fight Against the Authorities' Power**

In the beginning, the authorities use their power to abuse Collins. Thinking that she is right, Collins must find a way to fight the authorities who use power to abuse her. She must fight the police and doctor's power. Initially, Collins cannot fight the authorities' power by confronting them directly. She knows that the authorities' power is too strong for her. However, since power is more

a strategy (Mills, 35), Collins has a chance to win the case as long as she uses an effective strategy. In the end of the story, Collins wins the case using strategies of complying, gathering evidence, and getting allies.

### ***Complying***

At first, as we can see in 2.1, Collins confronts the authorities' power but she fails. She cannot fight directly because the authorities' power is too strong. The authorities abuse their power to Collins. They use verbal and emotional abuse to Collins. Therefore, she finds other strategies to fight the authorities' power. She thinks that complying is the best choice because she can find other strategies to fight the authorities. Since power is more a strategy (Mills, 35), she finds another strategy to fight back and to win. She is pretending to accept the fake son and the doctor's verdict.

#### ***Accepting the Fake Son***

When Collins knows that she can fight directly to authorities, she decides to accept the boy that actually is not her son. LAPD is successful bring back Collins' son, but Collins feels that the boy is not her son. She reports to Jones (the police officer), but Jones uses verbal and emotional abuse to force Collins to accept the boy. Therefore, she must accept the fake son to find another way to fight back.

Jones: If there's any problem, any problem at all, come and talk to me and I'll take care of it. *(beat)* Mrs. Collins...he has nowhere else to go.

*It's an agonizing moment, then finally:*

Collins: I...look, I'll take him home, but only because I...might not be thinking clearly right now, and --

Jones: Thank you.

***INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER***

*-- the car door SLAMS and she and the boy sit side by side.*

*The silence is in profound contrast to the madness of a moment earlier. An officer gets in they drive off, passing Jones and the Chief of Police, talking quietly off to one side. Christine looks to the boy. He smiles at her.*

From the conversation above, Collin cannot fight back directly to Jones because she knows that Jones has more power than she does. By accepting the boy, it will make Jones feel that Collins respects him. Jones promises to Collins if she takes the boy home and there is something wrong with the boy, he will do the investigation. Jones says with high tone and little bit force Collins. He wants Collin to accept the boy first and hope Collins accepts the boy. Collins sees that it is a chance to get attention from Jones later if the boy is not her son. She can fight back by asking Jones to do another investigation and confess to public if he is wrong about the boy. By pushing Jones to confess to public and says that he is wrong do the investigation, it makes him become powerless and make Collins become powerful. In the end of the story, Collins can fight back and prove that the boy is not her son.

Accepting the fake son does not mean Collins lose. Collins accepts the fake son because she thinks another strategy to fight back. The authorities' power is too strong, that is why if she fights directly she will lose. Collins wants Jones calm his condition first before she fights back. After accepting the fake son, Jones does not force Collins anymore because he thinks that Collins accepts the boy. Collins does that thing because Collins needs time to think another strategy.

#### ***Accepting the Doctors' Verdict***

Secondly, not only fighting the police's power, Collins also tries to fight the Doctors' power. Both Doctors, Dr Tarr and Dr. Steele, are abuse their power to Collins. Collins cannot fight directly to both doctors because if she fights she will lose. Both Doctors have more power than Collins, so she must find a way to fight their power. Both of them make a statement that Collins is sick. Here, Collins is ignoring Dr. Steele. She will not sign the letter because she knows that she is right about the boy.

Dr. Steele: By signing, you certify that you were wrong when you stated the boy returned by the police was not your son. It further stipulates that the police acted properly in sending you here for observation and absolves them of all responsibility for --

Collins: I won't sign it.

Dr. Steele: Then your condition is not improved. (*beat*) Sign it, and you can be out of here first thing tomorrow.

Dr. Steele wants Collins to sign a letter that tells she is wrong about identifying the son. He wants Collins confess that she is wrong. Actually, Doctors make a statement that Collins is sick because they help the police to push Collins to accept the boy. At first, Collins is ignoring Dr. Steele. She does not sign the letter. However, when Dr. Steele wants Collins to sign it again, she does it because she will prepare another strategy. Her strategy is accepting doctor's verdict. By accepting the Doctor's verdict, the Doctors' will believe that Collins is sick. Accepting Doctor's verdict will give her time to arrange a plan to fight back their power and make the Doctor release her from the hospital soon. Collins can reveal that Dr. Steele and Dr. Tarr only help the police and make a wrong statement. The public will know that they are lying and their name will become bad in public.

Accepting the fake son and the doctor's verdicts are Collins' first strategy to fight the authorities. Accepting the fake son and doctors' verdict is will give Collins time to thinks another strategy. If she fights directly, she will lose because the authorities' power is strong. Collins comes from common people and does not have power, while the authorities have more power in society.

### ***Gathering Evidence***

Foucault says, "Power is everywhere" (Foucault 1998, p. 93), however, "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1998, p. 93). Collins uses another strategy. She is gathering the evidence to fight the authorities' power. She gathers the evidence from many sources that she can find. By gathering evidence, she will get more power, because power comes from everywhere. Collins will get power from the evidence that she has been collected. If she gathers evidence, she will win to fight the authorities. To win her case, she decides to get testimony from people who know her and her son and medical proof from another doctor.

First of all, Collins tries to get testimony from people she knows. First person she meets is Walter's teacher.

Mrs. Fox: Mrs. Collins, if that's your son, I'll eat my yardstick. Not only will I put that in writing, I'll swear to it in a court of law and in front of President Calvin Coolidge himself if I have to.

Collins gathers the evidence from the Walter's teacher. She believes Walter's teacher will recognize her son. She believes if Walter's teacher will help her to identify her son. Walter's teacher should be recognizing her son, because she teaches Walter for a long time. The teacher recognizes the son is not Walter and she will testify for Collins. Collins is happy and optimist if she will win.

Second person she meets is from another doctor. She needs medical proof to strengthen her evidence to fight the authorities.

Dr. Montgomery: In some cases, yes, it's possible. But the muscle between walter's teeth prevents that from happening. They can never come together without an operation to sever the muscle, and I can tell you right now that he has never had such an operation.

Collins: Will you be willing to sign a letter saying that officially?

Dr. Montgomery: Pardon my language, but...hell,yes.

From the conversation above, Collins also gathers the evidence from the doctor. She meets doctor that does not come from the police. She needs the medical proof to strengthen her evidence to fight the authorities. Medical proof is one kind of knowledge. From doctor's medical proof Collins has power because knowledge is always a form of power (Foucault 1977, p. 27). The doctor agrees to help Collins to fight the authorities by sign a letter. By gathering evidence from the Walter's teacher and the doctor, there is a chance that Collins will win to fight the authorities' power.

Collins feels that two strategies are not enough for her to fight the authorities. She finds another way to make her strong to fight the authorities.

### ***Getting Allies (supports)***

To make Collins strong enough to fight the authorities she finds another way. Power is a network of relations (Mills, 35). Collins is getting allies to make a network of relation to fight back the authorities. She tries to get support from the Church represented by REV. Briegleb and from the

society around her. When she fights by herself, she is not strong enough, but if she fights with many people, she get more power to fight back.

Collins and the society know that the authority is used to guide society, provide order, and create sense of security, but here the authorities do the opposite. They do not guide and do not create sense of security. Therefore, Collins finds a way to fight back to them. Collins gets support from the people that she knows and from the people that she does not know.

*They walk quickly up one clogged street and down another, the police following on foot...moving toward the SOUND of voices, drums, and cars honking... until they turn onto Spring Street -- -- and find themselves in the middle of the biggest protest march ever recorded in the history of Los Angeles to this date. Thousands of people crowd into the street, overwhelming the police presence...not rioting, but making their voices heard. The Salvation Army, the Women's Temperance Society, the Society for Justice, Catholic groups, Union groups and ordinary citizens carrying placards and signs that read WE SUPPORT CHRISTINE COLLINS and JUSTICE FOR MRS. COLLINS and THE LAPD: A CITY'S SHAME...it just goes on and on and on. (p. 107)*

Collins brings the evidence that she has been collected from the Walter's teacher and from Dr. Montgomery's testimony and protesting with the society. The society feels sorry for Collins. They protesting to get attention and strive for justice. Getting allies is the last strategy that used by Collins to fight the authorities. Since power is a network of relations, getting allies is the strategy to make a relation with society that contains power to fight the authorities' power (Mills, 35). By getting allies, Collins will have more power to fight the authorities' power. Collins will fight with people who support her. If she fights by herself, she does not have power, but if she fights with society she will have more power.

## CONCLUSION

I find out in *Changeling* that Collins experiences real power game in her life. She experiences injustice from the police and the doctors. Both the police and the Doctors also use verbal abuse and mentally abuse to Collins. For verbal abuse, they are blaming, judging, and threatening Collins. They do it because they want to push Collins to accept the boy. They do not want Collins blames them about the boy. When they know that verbal abuse is not effective to push Collins, they use mentally abuse to Collins. The police and the doctor are degrading Collins's condition. They said that Collins was sick, although Collins is healthy. Jones as the police officer also considers Collins cannot recognize her own son.

Since power is more a strategy (Mills, 35) Collins is using strategies of complying, gathering evidence, and getting allies to fight the authorities. At one time, Collins is confronting the authorities' power but she fails. She cannot fight directly because the authorities' power is too strong. Therefore, she finds other strategies to fight the authorities' power. She thinks that complying is the best choice because she can find other strategies to fight the authorities. The second strategy that she uses to support her first strategy after complying is gathering evidence. Foucault says, "Power is everywhere" (Foucault 1998, p. 93). To gain power, Collins tries to get testimony from people she knows. First person she meets is Walter's teacher. The second person she meets is another doctor. Foucault believed that knowledge is always a form of power (Foucault 1977, p. 27). Collins needs the medical proof to strengthen her evidence to fight the authorities. To make Collins strong enough after complying and getting evidence, she finds another way to fight the authorities. The third strategy that she uses is looking for allies. Power is a network of relations (Mills, 35). If she is getting allies and fight together with them, she will get power.

Based on the findings in the analysis, I conclude that there are two important things about power. Firstly, power is easily abused. The authorities, the police, and doctors abuse their power because they have more power. Usually the authorities will use verbal abuse to the powerless. If verbal abuse is not enough, they will use mentally abuse to push the powerless. Secondly, to fight against abuse power there are some ways that are effective to use. In *Changeling*, Collins uses complying, gathering evidence and getting allies. She knows if she fights directly, she will lose. Therefore, she is gathering evidence and getting allies to make her more powerful.

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